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SUBJECT: BROAD OPPOSITION FORMS AGAINST "ANTI-ISLAMIZATION CONGRESS"
IN COLOGNE

REF: 07 DUESSELDORF 22 (JUNE 26, 2007 "TALE OF TWO MOSQUES")

¶11. (U) Summary: Plans by the anti-immigrant, far right group "Pro Koeln" to hold a so-called "Anti-Islamization Congress" on September 19-20 in Cologne have provoked broad opposition from all major political parties, trade unions, and churches, as well as radical leftist and anarchist groups. Organizers expect about 1,000 participants from Germany and other European countries at the event, while Cologne police plan for as many as 40,000 counter demonstrators and have taken major security measures in view of potential violence. Mission Germany issued a Warden Message on September 17. End Summary.

Gathering of Anti-Immigrant Groups

¶12. (U) "Pro Koeln," a local anti-immigrant, far right group which gained 4.7 percent of the popular vote in the 2004 municipal elections, made national headlines by attempting to prevent the construction of Germany's largest mosque in the city (Reftel). The plan was approved by the Cologne City Council on August 28. In response, "Pro Koeln" has gone ahead with plans for an "Anti-Islamization Congress," which includes a September 20 public rally under the slogan "No to Islamization - No to Cologne's Mega Mosque." In its announcement, "Pro Koeln" listed keynote speakers from abroad, including Jean Marie Le Pen (Front National, France), Hans-Christian Strache (FPO, Austria), Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Belang, Belgium), and Mario Borghezio (Lega Nord, and MEP from Italy). Le Pen's office, however, has reportedly denied he has accepted the invitation, and Strache canceled his participation, promising to send a video message. A Bundestag backbencher, Henry Nitzsche from Saxony (independent, formerly CDU), is also scheduled to speak at the rally.

Broad Coalition Builds Against Congress

¶13. (U) Over the past several weeks, a broad alliance has been formed at the local and state level to oppose the event. Several counter demonstrations with an estimated participation of as many as 40,000 people have been scheduled before and during a "Pro Koeln" rally on September 20. The main counter demonstration will take place in front of the Cologne Cathedral with Cologne Lord Mayor Fritz Schramma (CDU) as the main speaker. Schramma has called on the citizens of Cologne to show their opposition to the "Pro Koeln" event with non-violent, peaceful means, reflecting concerns by police that leftist and anarchist "autonomous" groups might be posed to engage in violent clashes with rightwing followers and the police.

¶14. (U) On September 15, Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ruprecht Polenz, who also chairs the "Christian-Muslim Peace Initiative," together with Schramma and leading representatives of the "Turkish-Islamic Union" (DITIB), kicked off a poster campaign in Cologne under the slogan "Dialogue and Tolerance instead of Aggression and Fear." A resolution

entitled "Against Racism and Xenophobia - For Diversity and Tolerance" was introduced by all four parties in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) legislature on 9/11 and is likely to be unanimously adopted on September 18. The resolution expresses concern about the "Anti-Islamization Congress," stating that it runs counter to the "joint efforts of all political parties in the NRW Landtag to intensify intercultural and inter-religious dialogue." Minister-President Juergen Ruettgers (CDU) also warned against the event, stressing that he and his party are 'opposed to any form of extremism, either from the right or left" and that the CDU must prevent the establishment of a political force to its right.

Warden Message Issued

¶15. (U) In view of police concerns over the potential for violence, Mission Germany on September 17 issued a Warden Message advising American citizens to defer non-essential travel to Cologne on September 19 and 20, and encouraging American citizens in the Cologne area to avoid areas of demonstrations, if possible.

¶16. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Berlin and Consulate General Frankfurt.

BOYSE